

REPORT

THE INTERNATIONAL EXPERTS' MEETING ON GLOBALISATION AND AFRICA

The European Parliament, Brussels, April 15-17, 2004

TRIPLE AGENDA FOR CHANGE

1. Introduction

On April 15, 16 and 17, 2004, an International Experts' Meeting was held in the European Parliament in Brussels on the consequences of globalization for Least Developed Countries (LDCs) in Sub-Saharan Africa. For two-and-a-half days, academicians and representatives of civil society organisations from different parts of Africa, members (MEPs) and other representatives of political groupings in the European parliament, campaigners and other participants from a broad range of European countries, discussed the potential scope to intensify international campaign and lobbying work in favour of the impoverished populations of African LDCs. The process towards the holding of the Experts' Meeting was initiated by a Dutch Convening Committee, consisting of XminusY Solidarity Fund, the Transnational Institute, Both Ends, and the Netherlands Institute for Southern Africa (NiZA). The Meeting was hosted by the GUE/NGL grouping in the European Parliament which enthusiastically endorsed the agenda that had been proposed by the Dutch Convening Committee. The Convening Committee presents below summing-up of the results of this Experts' Meeting.

A key factor that inspired Dutch civil society organisations to work towards the Experts' Meeting was the oppositional strength which governments and civil society organizations from Africa showed during the Conference of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) held in Cancun, Mexico, in September of 2003. As reported in the world media, it was precisely cotton-producing countries of West-Africa which initiated the battle over Northern protectionism around agriculture when they tabled the demand for withdrawal of Northern subsidies around cotton production, on the very first day of the Cancun summit. Though the struggles which the weakest Southern states waged against the US and against the European Union in Cancun was to be overshadowed by the resistance of the Coalition of Twenty led by Southern giants such as Brazil, China and India, - there is no doubt that African peasant organizations, African NGO-campaigners and African governmental delegations played their own active role in opposing the unjust policies of Northern governments and Northern-dominated institutions. In the view of the Convening Committee, the Cancun experience should encourage European organizations to intensify their international campaign- and lobbying work in support of the peoples of Africa.

The Experts' Meeting in Brussels was divided into four separate sessions, reflecting the ideas of the Convening Committee with regard to the required thematic orientation of international campaign work on Africa. The first session had the character of a warming-up session on the effects of globalisation for Africa in general. The framework set by the keynote speaker Charles Abugre, and by Yashine Fall and by Oduor Ong'wen, inspired speakers in subsequent sessions to repeatedly refer back to the analysis presented at the onset of the Meeting. The second session was devoted to the thematic of the external debt of African LDCs. Here, both the African speakers, the European speaker and participants agreed on the urgent need to revive campaign work in support of cancellation or repudiation of the continually large

external debt of Sub-Saharan Africa. The third session had as title the right of African LDCs to defend their economies against the negative impact of participation in world trade. Two of the African speakers strongly advocated the importance for Europeans to focus on the issue of EPAs, the Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs), which the European Union seeks to impose on groups of African trade-partners. The fourth and last session was striking also, in the sense that the keynote speaker and others provided a comprehensive overview of the negative impact which the policies of international financial institutions have had on the functioning of the African state, which through the sixties and seventies of the previous century, had been geared towards the defense of its citizens' social and economic rights.

The main target of the Experts' Meeting was to set the agenda for future campaign and lobbying work. From this perspective, considerable efforts were made to ensure that a common declaration be adopted regarding European solidarity work towards Africa. On the first day, 15th April, discussions focused on the constitution of a drafting committee or synthesizing group. These efforts resulted in the drafting, from the side of African experts, of a declaration on '*Globalisation, Europe and Africa*'. Previous to the holding of plenary discussions on the given draft declaration, - African and European participants held informal consultations amongst themselves to sound out mutual opinions regarding the adoption of a common solidarity statement. These group consultations effectively helped pave the way for a plenary debate on the draft declaration, which debate took place on Saturday 17th April. The plenary had to choose between several procedural options regarding the adoption of the draft text. In the end, the declaration '*Globalisation, Europe and Africa*' was agreed upon in the form of a statement summarizing the outcome of the deliberations, and obliging participants to take forward, in particular, the *urgent issues* mentioned in the second part of the solidarity statement.

2. Trade Issues: Prioritizing EPAs

The priority issue posed by African speakers at the Experts Meeting in the European Parliament was the need to counter the plan of the European Union to clinch the Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) with groups of African trade-'partners'. In its Introductory Paper, delineating the thematic of the meeting, the Convening Committee had expressed itself in favour of the right of African LDCs to shield their economies against the negative effects of participation in world trade. Whereas most African LDCs are heavily dependent on the exports of a single or few primary products, the evolution in terms of trade between primary commodities exported by Southern countries and commodities thrown onto the world market by Northern countries, has been unfavorable to the South, as is brought out well by reports of UNCTAD for the five-year period from 1996 till 2001. Clearly, even a withdrawal of protectionist measures which the US and Europe have strenuously held on to so as to protect their agricultural sectors, would not suffice to help solve the grave crisis facing African LDCs dependent on the exports of primary commodities. Rather than the institution of 'free market' principles, special measures are needed to ensure that internal accumulation in African LDCs takes place.

African speakers during the trade session of the Experts' Meeting concretized these general ideas, by advising that European campaigners sympathetic to the issues/concerns of Africa, primarily focus on the issue of EPAs, the Economic Partnership Agreements proposed by the EU. The idea of EPAs was laid down in the treaty of 'cooperation' which the European Union in 2000 concluded with the ACP-countries in Cotonou, in replacement of the Lome-treaties which had regulated mutual economic relations since the end of formal colonialism. Through

EPAs, the European Union purports to institute zero tariffs between African countries and the European market - a target well beyond the WTO's agenda of progressive tariff reduction. Whereas the Europe Union in the past had recognized the need for *non-reciprocal* trade relations with Africa, the EU now engages in an offensive to achieve overall 'free trade' in its relations with African LDCs. According to observers of the negotiations' process around EPAs present at the Experts' Meeting, the European Union intends to complete the negotiating process, at the latest by the end of 2006. Keynote speaker Professor Yash Tandon, Nancy Kachingwe and other African trade specialists are so alarmed by the EU's new trade agenda that they appeal to European campaigners to help 'put on hold' the EPA-process until Africa is able to effectively negotiate on a par with the EU.

During the session of the Experts' Meeting in the European Parliament, a host of criticisms were put forward against EPAs. One key element fuelling African anger is the fact that existing processes of regional integration are being hampered by the EU's policies on EPAs. Both in East Africa and in Southern Africa, significant progress had previously been scored with the construction of economic cooperation between countries of the given regions, the relevant examples being SADC and the customs' union between Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania. Within the framework of the negotiations towards EPAs, however, new regional groupings are being constituted under the EU's guidance, a phenomenon which reminds African experts of the arbitrary redivision of boundaries in Africa which European colonial powers imposed under the notorious treaty of Berlin (1884). Further, there are great fears that a bottom-line 'free trade' regime will negatively affect the economic position of African countries which depend on income from foreign trade for financing of their annual budgets. Whereas structural adjustment programs imposed by the Bretton Woods institutions in the past have much weakened the capacity of African states to promote the welfare of their populations, the implementation of EPAs threatens to, *inter alia*, further undermine the social state in Africa.

The principled arguments put forward against EPAs were supported with information provided by Yash Tandon, by Nancy Kachingwe and by participants of the Experts' Meeting on the nature of the negotiating process as conducted by the EU. Reportedly, many African countries through the first round of negotiations on EPAs showed hesitance and were in no mood to rush through the exercise. Yet the European Union was in a great hurry to move towards the second phase of negotiations as soon as possible, brushing aside all evidence that outstanding issues from the first phase had not been resolved. This has been interpreted by Yash Tandon and others as proving that the European Union is primarily out to counter and compete with the US in its drive for economic influence in Africa. Thus, African experts in Brussels felt justified in suggesting that the issue of EPAs be incorporated as *lead issue* in the statement on solidarity between Europe and Africa to come out of the Experts' Meet. Moreover, African and European civil society organizations, immediately after the meeting in the European Parliament, held a specific strategy meeting, and adopted a campaign statement on EPAs which has since been up for signatures by organizations in both continents. Although a network of NGOs concerned about EPAs existed previous to the Brussels' Experts' Meeting, since then the EPA-campaign has really 'taken off'.

3. The Debt of African LDCs: Patently Unresolved Issue

A second issue prominently addressed during the Experts' Meeting is that regarding the external debt of African LDCs. Contrary to African trade issues Africa's burgeoning debt has

been part of international campaign efforts for quite a number of years. The Jubilee campaigns, which in the late nineties succeeded in building worldwide public opinion in favour of debt cancellation, were not exclusively focused on the needs of the populations of African LDCs. However, since those countries constitute the bulk of countries defined as LDCs the governments and populations of Africa were key potential beneficiaries of the demands put forward by the Jubilee campaigns. Further, as is well known, under the impact of the campaigns demanding debt relief, as well as to help restore their image which was badly tarnished due to the negative consequence of structural adjustment programs, the multilateral institutions, the World Bank and the IMF, decided to launch a debt relief initiative known as HIPC (the 'Highly Indebted Poor Countries' - initiative). Yet though the given initiative has not by any means helped to solve the South's external debt issue, few Northern politicians are aware of the urgency of the debt issue today. Hence, as agreed by both Demba Moussa Dembele, by Charity Musamba, and by Greetje Lubbi, speaking at the debt session of the Experts' Meeting, there is a great need to *re-intensify* international campaign efforts on debt, in particular in favour of African LDCs.

First, both the keynote speaker, Demba Moussa Dembele, and the respondent, Charity Musamba, strongly agreed on the utter insufficiency, and the contradictory nature of the debt relief measures undertaken from the North so far. Thus, according to Dembele, the amount of debt which has actually been cancelled out of the amount of debt relief committed has only been a minor share. Meanwhile, vast transfers of financial resources from African LDCs to the North have continued all through the decade of the 1990s, and have been at the expense of the capacity of African states to cater to the needs of their own impoverished populations. Whereas the World Bank and the IMF officially aim at bringing the LDC's debt down to sustainable levels, the criterium regarding financial *sustainability* has been fixed arbitrarily, and without due regard for the poverty crisis prevailing in large parts of Sub-Saharan Africa. Moreover, the conditionalities which the multilateral institutions pose for Southern countries to be able to benefit from the HIPC initiative, are such as to further compound the extreme plight of these countries. For the conditionalities attached to HIPCs, which are interconnected to PRSPs, in the eyes of African experts tend to offset any potential gains which African countries might gain from the very limited debt relief under the HIPC-initiative.

The plea from the side of African speakers and participants at the Experts' Meeting was unequivocally in favour of *total debt cancellation* as the only possible realistic campaign target. This is seen as the only possible solution, if the social targets which Northern governments and institutions have set under the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are to be met. In fact, the United Nations and other international institutions have already sounded the alarm, indicating that given present conditions many African countries are bound to fail in achieving the MDGs. Even given comprehensive cancellation of their debt, African LDCs would still need massive assistance to achieve the MDGs. And although few Northern countries may be inclined to agree that the existing external debt of LDCs is illegitimate, a section of international debt campaigners has started arguing so, since (at least part of) the Southern debt has been contracted by illegitimate governments, and since the South has already repaid the external debt officially contracted many times over. Moreover, *total debt cancellation* is not just the only solution in the eyes of African experts on the debt issue, but reportedly is in accordance with a growing understanding among bi-lateral creditors having internally discounted the debt of LDCs.

Lastly – the deliberations held during the Experts' Meeting have brought out well, that there exists a good basis for *intensification* of campaign efforts on the African debt. Thus, the

Dutch Jubilee campaign, at the Experts' Meeting represented by its chairperson Greetje Lubbi, along with non-governmental organisations in other European countries, has recently focused energies on lobbying Europarliamentarians, arguing that the whole issue of debt sustainability needs to be redefined. From his side, Dembele in his keynote address advised to focus lobbying efforts on the governments of EU-countries, proposing that all EU members should pledge to cancel the remaining bilateral debt of LDCs without conditionalities, and that they should use their influence within the World Bank and IMF such as to promote cancellation of the multilateral debt. And although there are bound to be differences in emphasis between campaign and lobbying efforts undertaken from African and efforts undertaken from Europe, European campaigners can draw strength from the fact that a growing number of African governments are convinced that Africa has no other option but to unilaterally cancel its outstanding external debt. Thus, revival of campaigning on the debt can and should be undertaken within a perspective of a, likely, increasing African assertiveness on the issue in the near future.

4. Restoration of the Social State in Africa: New Issue for Campaign Work in Europe

The third issue on the agenda of the International Experts' Meeting was that regarding the restoration of the social state. In order to underline its conviction, that the existing poverty crisis in African LDCs cannot possibly be solved without addressing this issue, the Convening Committee had chosen to devote one separate session to the question of the social state in the context of Africa. Here it was and is understood, of course, that the thematic of the social state and its weakening under the impact of globalization policies is not an exclusively African issue, but is eminently a *global issue*. Although historically there have been differences in the way the functioning of the social state was shaped in African as compared to (Western) Europe, in the post-Second World War period there existed a broad international consensus that the state is not just responsible for defending the security of its citizens, but should responds to the social needs of its citizens too. Again, when neoliberal policy-ideas gained ground, and especially so in the decade of the 1990s, its prescriptions were not just accepted or imposed in one specific region of the globe, but worldwide. Nevertheless, there are clear reasons as to why to focus specifically on the demise, and the need to restore, the social state in Africa, for in no other continent have the consequences of the weakening of the social state, and of the state in general, been as destructive as in the case of Africa.

The session of the Experts' Meeting was the occasion for a broad conceptual and historical overview on the social state, provided by keynote speaker Adebayo Olukoshi, and supported with practical and analytical views by Moses Kambou and Edward Oyugi. As Olukoshi argued, the colonial state as originally constructed by European powers in their African colonies was almost completely unconcerned with social questions, and largely limited itself to generating revenue. It is only after the Second World War, under the impact of revolutionary pressures building up worldwide, and with the rise of international social democracy, that the concept of the state's responsibility towards its citizens changed. This change, further, was very well reflected in policies instituted by post-colonial states in Africa. According to Olukoshi, no matter what the state's official ideology, African states in the sixties and seventies of the previous century almost unanimously followed the notion of state-led development, undertook state-planning, set up public sector enterprises, and invested heavily in social sectors such as education and health. Further, whereas the World Bank and the IMF have defined the period of state-led development as the lost decades, the 1960s and the 1970s were the 'socially expansive' phase in Africa's development. These policies need

not be glorified, for at the time they also gave rise to internal conflicts. Yet the structural adjustment policies (SAPs) formulated and imposed by the international financial institutions, such as the withdrawal of subsidies and the privatization of public goods, rather than helping to avert a crisis, 'fed into the context of crisis'. In short, SAPs with their one-sided anti-state ideology set back Africa in social terms. In Olukoshi's view, 'for Africa the first immediate task is to re-habilitate the social state'.

Now, although inclusion has helped to *agendize* the issue of the social state as a key issue for international campaign work, the Experts' Meeting has not resulted in the formulation of concrete campaign targets. Though the issue was readily incorporated into the summary statement adopted on Saturday 17th April, the Convening Committee itself is to concretize the given task. In this context, it may be helpful to state the potential for building up pressure towards the European Union. Whereas social democratic forces which played a decisive role in the construction of the social state in Europe in the nineties failed to mobilize broad opposition to the EU's policies aimed at acceleration of liberalization/privatization in EU member states, around the debate on the European constitution a significant controversy has arisen, *inter alia*, over the need to defend public services. Further, we also need to register the fact that opposition against GATS (General Agreement on Trade in Services), which aims at liberalization of all services, including services related to the functions of the social state, has been building up in Africa, as elsewhere. It appears, that the European Union to a certain extent has been forced to take cognizance of the controversies over GATS in its policies towards Africa, since it reportedly has excluded education and health from its liberalization 'requests' towards African countries. Nevertheless, a concrete policy which helps to counter the rhetoric of 'good governance', which helps to counter further pressure towards liberalization/privatization of social services, and which promotes *restoration* of the social state in Africa, remains to be formulated.

5. Some Limitations

In its evaluation of the International Experts' Meeting, the Netherlands-based Convening Committee along with the successes for campaign-work achieved through the holding of the meeting, has also noted several limitations. The first, and perhaps most important limitation relates to the way in which the participation of Africans and Europeans had been structured. In spite of some differences of view on this the Convening Committee in the course of its preparations had agreed to allocate most of the time for presentations through the four content sessions of the Experts' Meeting to African experts, so that African experts in the respective fields of trade, the debt and the social state themselves would be offered the full opportunity to set targets for follow-up campaign work. From the same perspective also, the Convening Committee invited keynote speakers of the various sessions to lead the synthesizing process, - which process resulted in the drafting of the summary report entitled '*Globalisation, Europe and Africa. Towards a Solidarity Agenda*'. On the other hand, the role of European campaigners and activists working on African issues in the Experts' Meeting was defined as a restricted one, i.e. to participate in the deliberations of the four content sessions and to join in discussing the summary statement which emerged from the synthesizing process. During the final session of the Experts' Meeting, leading African speakers criticized the given approach since it put the full burden of informing the Meeting's participants onto Africans alone, and since it provided African attendants insufficient scope to acquaint themselves with European efforts in support of African causes. In its evaluation, the Convening Committee concluded that the given criticism is valid, and should fully be taken into account in follow-up initiatives which the Committee may undertake. Through inviting a broader range of Europeans to

address the nexus of trade, debt and the social state alongside African speakers, the political follow-up to an Experts' Meeting such as that held, can be more easily ensured.

A second key point that came up in the Committee's evaluation relates to the institutional targets for campaign work on Africa from Europe. When reflecting on the consequences of globalization for Sub-Saharan Africa previous to the meeting, the Convening Committee had tended to focus on several possible institutional targets simultaneously. It was understood that given the fact that the Experts' Meeting as going to be held in the European Parliament, the responsibility of the European Union for the ongoing poverty crisis in Africa should necessarily be addressed. However, the Committee also suggested to target the world institutions which are primarily responsible for overall globalization policies, i.e. the World Trade Organisation (WTO), the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). In its evaluation, the Convening Committee concluded in favour of directing its own campaign energies around all three issues, trade, debt and the social state, towards the European Union, and to primarily target changes in policymaking at the European level. In the case of trade, this choice of target is automatically implied by the choice made to focus on the Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs), which do express a WTO 'free trade' agenda, but are the EU's agenda for future economic relationships with countries in Africa. With regard to the external debt of African LDCs, a number of campaign organisations in Europe have recently developed lobby-work in order to influence the standpoints of the different political groups in the European Parliament. Here the target already is the European Union's policy on the unsustainable external debt of LDCs. But with regard to the issue of the restoration of the social state too there is much reason to target EU-policies. In the context of negotiations over the WTO's General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS), the European Union has charted its own course of action. It has submitted liberalization requests to African governments, to facilitate investments by European service companies. And although, as stated, these request reportedly have excluded the areas of education and health, the EU's course of action nevertheless contributes to the further weakening of the social state in Africa. Granted - it is not very simple to achieve an integration of campaign-efforts relating to trade, debt and the social state. But a singular focus on European policymaking institutions obviously facilitates addressing challenges in an 'interconnected fashion', as agreed on in the summary statement of the Experts' Meeting.

6. Conclusion

The aim of the Experts' Meeting on Globalisation and (Sub-Saharan) Africa held in April last in the European Parliament was to help build an agenda for international campaign and lobbying work around African LDCs. To this end, the Convening Committee chose not to hold a Conference-like event, in which all 'stake-holders' are invited to take part, but rather to stage an Experts' Meeting in which a selected number of specialists from African countries would exchange views with representatives of the European Parliament and representatives of European civil society organizations. Further, although much work remains to be done to promote an increased awareness amongst the European public regarding the effects of globalization policies for Africa, the Convening Committee chose not to devote lengthy sessions to the general topic of globalisation, but rather to divide the Meeting's work largely into three separate thematic sessions devoted to actual and potential campaign topics, i.e. debt, trade and the restoration of the social state. The first conclusion that seems justified, is that the Meeting did meet the target which had been set. Thanks largely to the participation of reknowned and very knowledgeable African speakers, the necessary knowledge and energy

were shared so as to promote campaign and lobbying work around issues which need to be addressed, if the existing poverty crisis besetting African LDCs is to be resolved.

The most visible and easily noticeable outcome of the Experts' Meeting, and of the special strategy meeting held subsequently in Brussels, is that the international campaign around EPAs has taken off with much force. Whereas previous to the holding of the Experts' Meeting, an initial network of nongovernmental organizations existed devoted to opposing EPAs, since April a strikingly large number of trade and developmental organizations in Europe have concluded that this is indeed a crucial issue, and have either signed up for the campaign declaration '*Stop EU-ACP Free Trade*', or have formulated their own criticisms regarding the EU's policy on EPAs. Within a brief span of time, also, the issue of EPAs has moved up the ladder of the priorities of trade initiatives in Europe, and is set to become a prominent topic at the European Social Forum (ESF), which will be held in London in October 2004. Thanks to the devotion of EPA-campaigners, it appears that by now a significant basis has been laid for lobbying efforts both towards individual European countries and towards European-level political institutions. Given the existing time-table of negotiations around EPAs, there appears to be sufficient reason for optimism, for presuming that civil society organizations in Africa and in Europe together can influence the outcome of the EU's negotiations.

However, one of the serious challenges which all campaigning and lobbying efforts around Africa have to deal with, is the reality that the poverty crisis of African LDCs is not starting with policies which *currently* are being adopted by Northern institutions and governments, or will be adopted in the near future. Instead, the poverty crisis prevailing in the region of Sub-Saharan Africa by now is roughly a quarter century old, and is being prolonged due to the continuation of faulty policies adopted by the multilateral institutions, and by the European Union, *long way back*. From this perspective, there is a need to ensure that campaign and lobbying work around the debt be revived with equal force, and that campaign work around the restoration of social state in Africa be given a concrete shape, i.e. *parallel* to the growth of the campaign on EPAs. Further, as parallel initiatives grow, it may be useful to remind ourselves of the commitment worded in the summary document of the Experts' Meeting, namely that we vow to approach our respective focus in individual areas 'in an integrated manner', and that we need to support each other's work in order to build a 'mutually reinforcing power'. Without such an approach, campaign results may turn out to be elusive. And whereas parallel initiatives to an extent may *implicitly* have the effect of being 'mutually reinforcing', it is logical for the Convening Committee to concentrate its own future energies on helping to strengthen an integrated agenda for policy changes in favour of (Subsaharan) Africa.

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